

ST. AIDAN'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Location: 207 Freeman Street, Brookline, MA

Denomination: Roman Catholic

Constructed: 1911

Acreage: 1.8 acres (together with Rectory)

National Register Status: October 17, 1985

Surrounding Area: Residential neighborhood with homes of similar age or older

Architects: Maginnis and Walsh

Architectural Style: Medieval Revival



Architectural Significance:

St. Aidan's Roman Catholic Church was designed by the nationally prominent architects of Roman Catholic churches, Maginnis and Walsh. Other designs by the firm in the Boston area include Emmanuel College (1916), the Gothic buildings of Boston College (1909), and what is considered to be Maginnis's masterpiece, the Church of St. Catherine of Genoa in Somerville. The architectural style of St. Aidan's is that of a Medieval village church, examples of which can be seen in France, England, and Ireland. Charles D. Maginnis was particularly interested in the design of village churches for contemporary parishes. St. Aidan's was his parish church and the design for the building was appropriate for the small community in terms of style and scale.

Maginnis intended the exterior of the church to appear "primitively simple," similar to village churches in his native Ireland. The two-story building was constructed using local materials including dressed, random ashlar which is stuccoed and painted white on its western elevation but left natural elsewhere with an addition of stuccoed half-timbering at the gabled nave and transept ends. The church has a spire, steep roofs, dormers of slate, and full-story, Gothic style stained glass windows, designed and produced by a Boston firm, at both ends of the nave and transepts. The interior of the church is traditional basilica with restrained and simple decorative detailing.

Historical Significance:

St. Aidan's was Brookline's third Catholic parish and was constructed in 1911 to serve the growing number of parishioners who lived in the community, as well as in North Brookline and Allston. His Eminence, Cardinal O'Connell, laid the cornerstone for the church bearing his arms on May 27, 1911, and officiated at the dedication in November, 1912. According to the Brookline Press: *"The occasion brought out about 1000 parishioners and many friends in Brookline and surrounding parishes, and the audience included many of the town officials."*

Cardinal O'Connell had a great love for St. Aidan's and chose Brookline as his official residence in 1915. It may be assumed that his presence in Brookline accorded all the Catholic parishes, but especially St. Aidan's, much prestige and made living here very attractive. From the beginning, St. Aidan's was the focal point of an important and vigorous Catholic community. With leaders such as Cardinal O'Connell and Monsignor John T. Creagh, a leading scholar in Canon Law and the second pastor of the church from 1913-51, St. Aidan's came to represent the young ideals of the community and the nurturing of these ideals within an environment that encouraged scholarship and attainment.

St. Aidan's was also the first house of worship for America's first Roman Catholic president, John F. Kennedy. President Kennedy's parents, Joseph P. and Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, attended St. Aidan's while living in Brookline on Beals Street (1914-21) and later on Abbottsford Road (1921-27). The Kennedy's took pride in their common heritage—both of their grandfathers hailed from County Wexford, Ireland—and worshipped in the Roman Catholic faith of their ancestors. The family regarded St. Aidan's as the center of their spiritual life and cornerstone of their faith. Six of the nine Kennedy children were baptized here, including John Kennedy in 1917 and Robert Kennedy in 1925. Monsignor Creagh gave the children their first religious instruction, and both Joseph, Jr. and John served as altar boys.